Original Article

A Nationwide Investigation of Individualized Plans in Japanese Special High Schools: Implications for the Collaborative Practices of Individualized Transition Support Plans

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We surveyed 220 Japanese special high schools in order to understand their current practices of individualized plans, transition and post-school assistance, teachers' needs and perceptions in the present study. We found that the teachers, especially at the schools for student with intellectual disabilities, collaborated with local community agencies for transition and post-school assistance although they did not invite the agency staff over for conferences to develop the individualized plans. The opinions from students and parents were reflected in the individualized plans for instruction on only a limited basis. Some significant differences were found among the 3 types of special high schools and their characteristics were discussed. Following the discussion, 3 recommendations for the future practice of Japanese individualized transition support plans were outlined. We suggest increased collaboration with local agencies, parent participation in the transition planning process, and student involvement with self-determination in their own transition planning.

Key Words: individualized transition support plans, individualized plans for instruction, collaboration with local agencies, parent participation, student involvement

Introduction

In Japan, individualized plans for instruction (*kobetsu no shido keikaku*) began in 1999 for students with disabilities to learn “activities for independence” (*jiritsukatsudo*) at special schools (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1999). Recently there have been calls to implement individualized support plans for employment (*kobetsu no shuro shien keikaku*) for high school students with disabilities (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2000; Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001b; Tokyo Public Special Schools for Intellectual Disabilities Associa-

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tion for Promoting Employment, 2001) in order to promote students' school-to-work transition. In spite of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's initiative on behalf of individualized support plans for employment, special high school teachers in Tokyo have been developing individualized transition support plans (*kobetsu iko shien keikaku*) instead, because they can include a wider range of students such as those who may not intend to work in a competitive or supported employment environment (Tokyo Department of Education, 2001; Tokyo Public Special Schools for Intellectual Disabilities Association for Promoting Employment, in press). Although it is not certain whether implementation of the individualized plans for employment or the individualized transition support plans will be in the next version of the Japanese educational regulations at the moment, we use the term "individualized transition support plans" in this study with the hope that individualized transition support plans will be available for a variety of students with special educational needs including learning disabilities or other learning problems and disadvantages due to their low socio-economic status or culturally/linguistically diverse background. These students may realize higher achievement in regular school settings and possibly have a better chance of transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education with appropriate assistance.

Individualized plans for instruction began because of the strong influence of individualized education programs (IEP) in the United States. The individualized transition support plans were also strongly influenced by individualized transition plans (ITP) that were developed as a "transition services" page in the IEP since the 1990 federal mandate in the United States (Everson, Zhang, & Guillory, 2001). The IEP are usually developed with a team of educational and medical professionals, parents and their advocates. The ITP are developed with a team including an even larger variety of people such as students with disabilities themselves, their families, teachers, jobcoaches, prospective employers, adult service providers or their community representatives and so forth (Mizutani & Yanagimoto, in press). Compared with the practices of individualized programs or plans in the United States, however, fewer people are involved with the individualized planning process in Japan. In the United States, education practitioners also have struggled to discover effective ways to involve students, their families and local agencies in the ITP process (Bassett & Lehmann, 2002; Blalock & Benz, 1999; Cozzens, Dowdy, & Smith, 1999; Wehmeyer, Morningstar, & Husted, 1999). Involving students, parents and other significant people in the transition planning process may become critical for Japanese teachers as well, in order to implement individualized transition support plans effectively.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the current practice of developing individualized plans, transition assistance, and post-school assistance in Japanese special high schools. So far we cannot find any research on Japanese individualized plans from the viewpoint of collaborative practices as we described above. Thus, implications for future practices regarding collaboration are also described.

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Method

1. Participants and Sampling

There are three kinds of special schools (*yogo gakko*) in Japan: special schools for students with intellectual disabilities, special schools for students with physical disabilities, and special schools for students with other health impairments. Special schools usually consist of 3 departments: the elementary department (grade 1–6), the lower-secondary department (grade 7–9), and the upper-secondary department (grade 10–12). They rarely have a kindergarten department for early intervention or a post-secondary department for career education (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001a). In the presents study, we refer to the upper-secondary department of three types of special schools as “special high schools” for convenience. Special schools that consisted only of an upper-secondary department (*koto yogo gako* or *koto-bu tandokuko*) were included in the population. We did not include schools for students who are blind (*mo gakko*) and schools for deaf students (*ro gakko*) in the population because these two were not categorized as special schools (*yogo gakko*) in Japan (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001a).

The cluster random sampling method was used to select participants in the present study. The cluster units were the 47 prefectures (*to-do-fu-ken*) of Japan. We used a table of random numbers for the selection. Out of a total of 501 special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities listed by the Japanese National Association of Special Education Schools’ Principals (2000), we selected one randomly from each of the 47 prefectures. Another special high school from each prefecture was added to the sample based on recommendation from staff of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Recommended schools were supposed to be actively practicing transition assistance although it was uncertain whether the schools implemented the individualized plans for that purpose or not. We also added all 23 special high schools that only have an upper-secondary department to the samples. Thus a total of 117 special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities were selected for the sample. Out of a total of 192 special high schools for students with physical disabilities, we randomly selected one from each prefecture that had both classrooms for students with physical disabilities and for severe and multiple disabilities. We also added all three special high schools that only have an upper-secondary department to the sample. Thus, a total of 50 special schools for physical disabilities was selected. We also selected all 53 special high schools for other health impairment for the sample.

A total of 220 special high schools nationwide was the subjects of this investigation. We asked the teachers in charge of transition assistance (*shinro shido*) at these schools to answer the questionnaire for the study.

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2. Pilot Study and Procedures

The first author interviewed teachers in charge of transition assistance at 10 special high schools in the greater Tokyo area for a pilot study (Mizutani & Fujita, 2001). The interviews mainly focused on the current practices of transition assistance including post-school assistance (“after-care”) and individualized plans for instruction.

Based on the findings of the pilot study, we developed the first draft of the questionnaire. Then we asked 13 special education teachers to examine each item on the questionnaire to evaluate the content validity. The final draft of the questionnaire consisted of 47 items that all 13 teachers considered appropriate. Multiple teachers answered the questionnaire a second time after a month interval with more than 90% test-retest reliability. We mailed the questionnaires with a cover letter to the principal explaining the intention of the investigation and a stamped return-envelope during the first week of September 2000. In the cover letter, we requested that the teacher in charge of transition assistance should fill in the questionnaire. We asked them to return the questionnaire without any identification by the end of October. We made phone calls to confirm that all the school principals had received the package, and explained the purpose of the investigation once again to assure better understanding and cooperation. All the pilot study interviews and the questionnaire survey procedures were conducted in standard Japanese.

The response rate of the questionnaire was 74.7% from the schools for students with intellectual disabilities (71 of 94 answered), 65.2% from the schools for students with intellectual disabilities which consisted only of an upper-secondary department (15 out of 23 answered), 78.7% from the schools for students with physical disabilities (37 of 47 answered), 66.7% from the schools for students with physical disabilities which consisted only of an upper-secondary department (2 of 3 answered), and 75.5% from the schools for students with other health impairments (40 of 53 answered). Total overall response rate was 75% (165 of 220 answered) and the results of the 165 questionnaires are the subjects for our data analysis. The data used for the analysis consisted of all 165 returned questionnaires. Of these, 52% were from special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities, 24% were from special high schools for students with physical disabilities, and 24% were from special high schools for students with other health impairments.

3. Data Analysis

First we examined the descriptive statistics for all 47 items on the questionnaire (see Tables 1, 3, 5 and 6) in order to see the trends of current practices, needs, and perceptions. Then we developed 131 contingency tables for the chi-square test that were two-dimensional with three types of schools as independent variables and with two or more categories based on the response on the questionnaire items as dependent variables. Finally, we selected 46 sub-items that demonstrated significance or significant tendencies as a result of the chi-square test, and further examined them using residual analysis (see Tables 2 and 4).

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TABLE 1 Practice of individualized planning and student assessment

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Domains (multiple responses accepted)
“activities for independence”=88% academic subjects=59%
occupational classes=53% special activities=40% others=20%
Students’ levels of disabilities (multiple responses accepted)
all students=84% severe/multiple=15% severe=5% moderate=3%
others=4%
Area commonly using a form for individualized plans for instruction
entire prefecture=3% school=50% department=38% grade=2%
others=7%
References when first draft was created (multiple responses accepted)
manual developed by the board of education=12% “Individualized plans Q&A
in Tokyo”=22% other schools’=35% unknown=14% others=40%
Persons who develop individualized plans for instruction (multiple response accepted)
classroom teacher=93% teacher in charge of transition assistance=9%
teacher in charge of “activities of independence”=38%
teacher in charge of academic subjects=37% other teachers=9%
Persons who participate in individualized plans meetings (multiple responses accepted)
teachers in same department=54% teachers of same grade level=47%
teachers of same academic subjects=36% teachers belonging to the same instruc-
tion group=57% administrators including principal=3% no meetings held=
3% others=15%
Persons who are asked opinions to develop individualized plans outside the meetings
(multiple responses accepted)
parents=75% students=39% home doctors=37% school doctors=16%
other medical professionals=27% vocational counsellors=11%
school psychologists=4% nobody=13% others=7%
Frequency of individualized plans meetings
annual=17% every semester=42% every month=11% none=3%
others=26%
Implementation of student assessment
yes (for all students)=67% yes (for some students)=25% others=8%
Methods of assessment (multiple responses accepted)
observations=59% interviews=52% tests=65% others=23%
Participants of the interview method for the assessment (multiple; out of 92 schools)
students=86 schools parents=84 schools specialists at local agencies=7 schools
others=4 schools

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Results and Discussion

1. Practices of Individualized Planning and Students' Assessment

Seventy percent of special high schools reported that their staff developed individualized plans for instruction. In comparison, individualized plans for transition assistance were developed only at 15% of the schools. Ninety-two percent of the schools stated that specific forms for individualized plans were available at their school. Student assessment was conducted at 92% of the schools. The school staff used results from vocational tests given at local agencies such as regional vocational centers. Student self-evaluation was conducted in classes at 32% of the schools. Table 1 reveals other aspects of individualized planning and student assessment. It indicates that by using reference manuals such as “Q&A in Tokyo” or the plans developed at other schools, the classroom teachers often develop individualized plans for instruction to teach the activities for independence (*jiritsu-katsudo*) class and other subjects to most of the students at Japanese special high schools. Almost half of the schools had planning meetings every semester, but participants in the planning meetings were limited to the teachers within the school. However, they considered the opinions of other people: 75% consulted parents, 39% consulted students, 37% consulted home doctors, 16% consulted school doctors, 27% consulted other medical professionals, 11% consulted vocational counselors, 4% consulted school psychologists, and 7% consulted others. The interview method for student assessment involved students (86 out of 92 schools conducting interviews) and parents (84 out of 92 schools). Thus it appears that special high schools try to collaborate with parents and students for individualized planning even though outsiders are not invited to the planning meetings yet.

We developed 3×2 contingency tables for the 3 types of schools and positive/negative response to questionnaire items for chi-square tests. Analyzing the data on individualized planning and student assessment, we found that 7 sub-items were significantly different at the 1% level, 6 sub-items at the 5% level, and 6 sub-items showed significant tendency at the 10% level in individualized planning and student assessment. We performed residual analysis for the above 19 sub-items (Table 2). The results indicated that special high schools for students with physical disabilities were more likely to develop individualized plans. They showed that 10 out of the 19 sub-items were positively significant. The teachers developed the individualized plans for instructing academic subjects and special activities by using the specific form common within the same department and with reference to the cases in the “Q&A in Tokyo” manual. Teachers at the schools for students with physical disabilities also considered the opinions of the students and other medical professionals significantly more. The schools for students with physical disabilities often contain special classrooms for students with severe/multiple disabilities. We find that the individualized planning appears to be practiced significantly more at the schools for students with physical disabilities. This is probably because Japanese educational regulations first

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TABLE 2 Differences among the three types of special high schools: Individualized planning and student assessment

	χ^2	MR	PH	OHI
developing individualized plans for instruction on academic subjects	5.3 [†]		+	—
on special activities	5.3 [†]		+	
on “activities for independence”	5.7 [†]	—		
on occupational lessons	8.6 [*]	+		—
developing individualized plans only for students with severe disabilities	4.8 [†]		+	
only for students with severe/multiple disabilities	6.5 [*]		+	
using a common form within the same department	5.7 [†]		+	
using a form developed similarly to the ones in “Q&A in Tokyo”	9.8 ^{**}		+	—
being aware of the year that you began to use the current form	5.4 [†]			—
planning meetings held within teachers of the same grade level	11.6 ^{**}	+		—
opinions considered for developing the plans from students	8 [*]	—	+	
from home doctors	16.5 ^{**}	—		+
from other medical professionals	7.4 [*]	—	+	
using observation method to assess the employment domain	12.5 ^{**}	+		—
the post-secondary education domain	17.5 ^{**}	—	+	
using interview method for transition assistance with parents	7.8 [*]		—	
to assess employment domain	15.5 ^{**}	+	—	
to assess post-secondary education domain	24.5 ^{**}	—	+	+
implementing student self-evaluation in classes	8 [*]	+	—	

Notes. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, [†] $p < .10$ +/— significance/significant tendencies as the results of residual analysis.
MR=special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities, PH=special high schools for students with physical disabilities, OHI=special high schools for students with other health impairments.

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TABLE 3 Transition assistance practices

Number of teachers in charge of transition assistance (relieved from teaching obligations)
1=74% 2=19% more than 3=7%
Number of teachers in charge of transition assistance (with some teaching obligations)
1=25% 2=13% 3=11% 4-6=28% 7-9=18% 10-12=5%
Transition assistance manuals
developed at own school=51% commonly used with other schools=4%
developed by the prefecture=5% none=33% others=7%
Local agencies collaborating for transition assistance (multiple responses accepted)
public job placement centers=93% regional vocational centers=78%
employment support centers=25% regional work support centers=17%
department of welfare=77% department of rehabilitation counselling=41%
department of sanitation=9% others=22%
Problems of transition assistance for students with severe/multiple disabilities (multiple responses accepted)
lack of post-school options=89% partnerships with parents=32%
partnerships with local administration=51% lack of resources=36%
difficulty of instruction=35% consistency of support with agencies=34%
others=16%

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requested to develop individualized plans for instruction with respect to the activities for independence (*jiritsu katsudo*) which were mostly meant for students with severe/multiple disabilities (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1999). Besides, in 2 sub-items, the use of observation/interview methods for assessing the post-secondary education domain was also positively significant. This is probably because the schools for students with physical disabilities also contain classrooms for students with physical impairments who may not be cognitively delayed.

In the schools for students with intellectual disabilities, 5 out of 19 sub-items showed positive significance and 6 out of 19 sub-items showed negative significance (Table 2). The teachers developed the individualized plans for instructing their occupational lessons probably because those lessons might be considered as a part of the vocational training programs at the schools for students with intellectual disabilities that focused on students' employment as their goals. At the schools for students with intellectual disabilities, they used both observation and interview methods to assess employment domain and tried student self-evaluation in classes to prepare for the worksite vocational training. The use of both observation and interview methods to assess the post-secondary education domain was negatively significant (Table 2). The results indicate that obtaining employment, rather than the post-secondary education, was the main focus at the special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities.

There were 2 sub-items which were positively significant at the schools for students with other health impairments. The teachers considered the opinions of

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home doctors for individualized planning possibly because of the students' more serious medical needs. Student assessment was done using the interview method since intellectual abilities are not affected, and teachers might recommend the students to go to college or other post-secondary training programs as far as their health conditions would allow.

2. Transition Assistance Practices

Table 3 shows that there is at least 1 full-time teacher in charge of transition assistance who is relieved of any teaching obligations (74%) and another teacher in charge of transition assistance with some teaching obligations (25%). Since there are no mandatory requirements, each school can decide the number of teachers in charge of transition assistance. It could be better to have more than one teacher working for transition assistance because visiting worksites can be very time/energy consuming when students need to be placed for training or initial employment. But sometimes the number of teachers is reduced to place more full-time faculty in charge of transition assistance. And the teachers in charge of transition assistance have less opportunity to get to know their students if they are relieved from classroom teaching. Therefore, it may be best if teachers shared their working hours for classroom teaching and transition assistance.

The schools collaborated with public job placement centers (93%), regional vocational centers (78%), employment support centers (25%), regional work support centers (17%), departments of welfare (77%), departments of rehabilitation counseling (41%), departments of sanitation (9%), and other local agencies (22%) for transition assistance. The collaboration with public job placement centers and regional work support centers was statistically significant for the schools for students with intellectual disabilities. The collaboration with vocational centers and the departments of welfare was statistically significant for both the schools for students with intellectual disabilities and the ones for students with physical disabilities. The collaboration with the department of rehabilitation counseling was statistically significant for the schools for students with physical disabilities. The collaboration of schools for students with other health impairments with these agencies was generally negatively significant. This is probably because they sent more graduates to post-secondary education (10.5%) and other educational settings (15.0%) compared with other types of schools [approx. 1% for post-secondary education, and 2.3% (MR) or 5.4% (PH) other educational settings] (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001b).

The results of the chi-square tests for transition assistance sub-items are presented on Table 4. Overall, 6 sub-items were statistically significant at the 1% level and 3 were at the 5% level, and 2 sub-items at the 10% level. As a result of the residual analysis, we find that both the schools for students with intellectual disabilities and the schools for students with physical disabilities are more significant than the schools for students with other health impairment for current practice. The schools for students with physical disabilities were positively significant in 6 out of 11 sub-items

TABLE 4 Differences among the three types of special high schools: Transition and post-school assistance, practice and needs

	χ^2	MR	PH	OHI
developing annual whole-school plans for transition assistance	11**	+		-
transition assistance in employment domain	6.5*	+		-
post-secondary domain	35.5**	-	+	+
independent living domain	5†		+	
collaborating with public job placement centers for transition assistance	7.7*	+		-
vocational centers	19.5**	+	+	-
regional work support centers	6.1*	+		
department of welfare	18.4**	+	+	-
department of rehabilitation counseling	17**		+	-
problems due to lack of post-school options for students with severe/multiple disabilities	5.8†			-
lack of resources for students with severe/multiple disabilities	18.3**		+	-
implementing post-school assistance	15.6**	+		-
implementing post-school assistance emphasizing on employment	12**	+	-	-
post-secondary education	23.4**	-		+
post-school assistance due to discharge by the employer	26**	+		-
discharge by graduates' responsibility	26.7**	+	-	-
work attitudes	25.1**	+	-	-
post-school assistance resolving problems with friends	5.1†	+		-
in activities of daily living	6.5*	-		+
post-school assistance by regular visits to workplace	24.2**	+	-	-
by irregular visits to home when needed	11*		+	-
by formal gatherings with other graduates	14**	+	-	-
by continuing education	10.5**	+	-	
vocational counselors collaborating for post-school assistance	4.9†	+		
no local agencies collaborating for post-school assistance	5.4†	-		+
a need to include all domains of the ITP into the transition assistance	11.3†	-	+	
a need for transition/post-school assistance specialists at any local agencies	7.2*	+		-

Notes. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$ + / - significance/significant tendencies as the results of residual analysis

MR=special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities, PH=special high schools for students with physical disabilities, OHI=special high schools for students with other health impairments

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including transition assistance both in the post-secondary education domain and the independent living domain, collaboration with 3 agencies listed above, and experiencing problems due to lack of resources for students with severe/multiple disabilities. The schools for students with intellectual disabilities developed annual whole-school plans for transition assistance. They also provide significance in transition assistance in the employment domain as well as collaboration with the four agencies that mostly related to employment. We find that the schools for students with intellectual disabilities focused on students' employment more than other types of schools. The schools for students with other health impairments showed positive significance only in the post-secondary education domain and negative significance in other transition assistance sub-items. It was apparent that they focused on post-secondary education for the students.

3. Post-School Assistance Practices

Ninety percent of schools implemented post-school assistance (*after-care*) generally within 3 years after students graduation or when required. Table 5 shows that schools provide assistance in the employment domain (87%) for a variety of reasons including interpersonal relationships at work (77%), dismissal due to the students' responsibilities (64%), dismissal due to bankruptcy or other responsibilities of the employers (55%), and work attitude (52%). Surprisingly, the actual performance on the jobs was only considered as a problem for 21% with regards to post-school assistance. This might be because employers do not have high expectations for young adults with disabilities in terms of vocational skills as long as they have a pleasant work attitude and interpersonal skills. As methods of practicing post-school assistance, regular (53%)/irregular (39%) visits at work, regular (17%)/irregular (32%) visits at home, formal gatherings at the school (61%) and continuing education (19%) were listed. No specialists participated in post-school assistance other than teachers (62%) unless they collaborated with counselors at public job placement centers (26%) or at regional work support centers (8%).

There were 14 sub-items in post-secondary assistance which were statistically significant: 9 sub-items were significant at 1% level, 2 sub-items at 5% level, and 3 sub-items at 10% level (Table 4). The schools for students with intellectual disabilities indicated positive significance in 10 out of 14 sub-items including implementation of post-secondary assistance, post-school assistance emphasizing employment, assistance due to dismissal by the employer, discharge by graduates' responsibilities, work attitudes, assistance resolving problems with friends, assistance by holding formal gatherings with other graduates at school, assistance by continuing education, and vocational counselor collaboration for the assistance. This may mean that young adults with intellectual disabilities needed post-secondary assistance more than other young adults. One of the reasons that these young adults with intellectual disabilities needed post-secondary assistance more than other young adults is that the schools might have excessively focused on the students' employment for transition goals after high school. It usually takes the young adults with intellectual disabilities longer to

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TABLE 5 Post-school assistance practice

Students provided with post-school assistance		
all graduates=	36%	graduates within 3 years=44% others=20%
Domains of the ITP implementing as post-school assistance (multiple responses accepted)		
employment=	87%	post-secondary education=11% independent living=53%
recreation/leisure=	47%	others=13%
Problems in the employment domain for post-school assistance (multiple responses accepted)		
dismissal due to the employers such as bankruptcy=	55%	
dismissal due to the graduates' responsibility or problems=	64%	
graduates' hope to leave/change the job=	56%	work attitudes=52%
performance on the job=	21%	
interpersonal relationships at work=	77%	sexual harassment=6% others=7%
Problems in the post-secondary education domain (multiple; out of 16 schools)		
acceptance from post-secondary educational institutions=	9 schools	
achievement/performance=	13 schools	others=6 schools
Problems in the independent living domain (multiple; out of 80 schools)		
activities of daily living=	59 schools	financial management=42 schools
public transportation=	14 schools	communication=53 schools others=11 schools
Problems in the recreation/leisure domain (multiple; out of 71 schools)		
spending free-time=	59 schools	friends=32 schools other relationships=31 schools
local activities=	20 schools	others=6 schools
Methods of post-school assistance (multiple responses accepted)		
regular visits at work=	53%	irregular visits at work=39%
regular home visits=	17%	irregular home visits=32% formal gatherings of graduates=61%
continuing education=	19%	others=19%
Specialists participating in post-school assistance other than teachers (multiple responses accepted)		
counsellors at regional work support centers=	8%	
counsellors at public job placement centers=	26%	
nobody=	62%	others=21%

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achieve the skills required at the worksite and they might be not ready when they graduate at the age of 18. It would be preferable if more vocational training or other career education courses were among their post-school options.

The schools for students with physical disabilities provide post-school assistance by irregular visits to the home when needed, probably for the ones with severe or multiple disabilities who might not work. The schools for students with other health impairments were statistically significant in three ways: implementation of post-school assistance emphasizing post-secondary education, post-school assistance resolving problems in the activities for daily living, and not collaborating with local agencies for post-school assistance. The results probably imply that young adults with other health impairments need assistance in the activities for daily living when they obtain

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TABLE 6 Needs and perceptions on the ITP and transition assistance

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Knowledge of the ITP practices in the United States
very knowledgeable=2% knowledgeable=29% just heard the name=36%
no=33%
Domains of the ITP included in transition assistance (multiple responses accepted)
employment=88% post-secondary education=54% independent living=79%
recreation/leisure=62%
A need to include all the ITP domains into transition assistance
yes=39% positively considering=39% no=13% others=9%
A need to locate transition specialists at local agencies
yes=96% no=4%
Local agencies needed to locate transition specialists (multiple responses accepted)
public job placement centers=67% regional vocational centers=59%
employment support centers=62% others=24%

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post-secondary education, since there are no appropriate local agencies for that purpose.

4. Needs and Perceptions on the ITP and Transition Assistance

Most of the teachers knew about ITP practices in the United States (Table 6). Many of them felt that they needed to include all the ITP domains including employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and recreation/leisure into their transition assistance practices. Most said that they needed to locate some transition specialists at local agencies to help them (96%). The agencies that they cited were public job placement centers (67%), employment support centers (62%), regional vocational centers (59%) and others (24%).

In the schools for students with physical disabilities, it was positively significant that they needed to include all the ITP domains into the transition assistance. In the schools for students with intellectual disabilities, the same item was negatively significant (Table 4). The teachers at the schools for students with physical disabilities may prefer to support students' transition from school to post-secondary education. The teachers at the schools for students with intellectual disabilities may think that students did not need post-secondary education because their students' cognitive abilities may not as high as other students even though there are possibilities for them to be further educated with the appropriate assisting services and some special considerations for learning.

Most express a need for transition/post-school specialists at local agencies (Table 6). The schools for students with intellectual disabilities significantly demonstrate this because they implemented post-secondary assistance practices significantly more than the other 2 types of schools (Table 4). Previous findings have shown that the 92% of special high schools implemented assessment at local agencies, but those agencies did not always offer much assistance or services for the students' transition other than conducting the vocational assessment.

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Implications for Practice

From the results of this study, we can summarize the implications for the future practice of individualized transition support plans in three main points.

1. Collaboration with Local Agencies for Shared Responsibility

Teachers in charge of transition assistance appear to have too much responsibility when they are required to support the students' transition and post-school assistance. Those who worked at the schools for students with intellectual disabilities collaborate the most with staff at other local agencies. They also express the need to place transition specialists at agencies such as public job placement centers and regional vocational centers. On the other hand, teachers only consult with other teachers at the same school on the students' transition matters. Currently, they do not involve other professionals outside the school in the students' individualized transition planning. If they would open their doors and invite outside agency staff into the students' transition planning process, they might be able to reach a better understanding of the students' transition needs. Furthermore, by sharing their roles in transition and post-school assistance with specialists from other agencies, they will feel less burdened themselves, and achieve a smoother transition for the students from school to the local community.

2. Parent Participation in the Transition Planning Process

At 75 Japanese special high schools, parents' opinions for developing students' individualized plans were considered, though the parents were not invited to individual planning meetings. The current practice is for teachers to discuss individualized planning among themselves. In contrast, parent participation in the IEP process has been mandatory in the United States since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142) was first enacted. In order to implement the student IEP in the U. S., the parent's signature is required. Parents are allowed to take any advocates to the IEP meetings, can request translators at the meetings, and can request any time or place for their IEP meeting in order to promote their full participation (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). However, research in the U. S. has shown that they still needed to promote parent participation in transition planning process, especially for those who tend to have less information about the transition planning process perhaps because of their culturally diverse background (Boone, 1992; DeFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Salembier & Furney, 1997). The teachers are expected to provide information in order to promote parent participation since not all parents want to participate actively in their children's education (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull, & Curry, 1980; Roessler, Shearin, & Williams, 1999; Steineman, Morningstar, Bishop, & Turnbull, 1993).

Similarly, promoting parent participation may be critical for effective develop-

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ment of individualized transition support plans in Japan, but only with careful consideration accorded with each parent's needs. For example, the teachers could sensitively prepare several options for parents to facilitate their children's educational decision making at the planning meetings.

3. Student Involvement in Their Own Transition Planning Process

Students' opinions were considered when the teachers developed individualized plans for instructions at Japanese special high schools for students with physical disabilities, but not at special high schools for students with intellectual disabilities. This is probably because the teachers are more cautious about self-determination in the students with intellectual disabilities. But in the United States, the latest amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (PL 105-17) give students the right to make their own educational decisions when they reach the age of 18 (§614 & §615). The research also shows that students' active involvement and self-determination in the transition planning process helps to promote success in their goal achievement (Eisenman, 2001; Zhang & Stecker, 2001).

It may be more difficult to promote the students' self-determination skills when they have intellectual disabilities. But teachers could include that as a goal of the students' individualized plans for instruction from the earliest stage of special education and practice it at natural settings in everyday school-life. Several programs specifically intended to promote students' self-determination and/or active involvement in transition planning process are commercially available (Field & Hoffman, 1996; Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1997; Halpern, Herr, Wolf, Doren, Johnson, & Lawson, 1997; Wehmeyer, & Lawrence, 1995), and Japanese teachers could use them for reference.

Conclusions

Two hundred twenty special high schools were surveyed in order to understand the current practices of developing individualized plans and collaborative effort for transition assistance. We find that teachers, especially at the schools for students with intellectual disabilities, collaborated with local agencies for transition assistance and post-school assistance but they did not invite them over for conferences to develop individualized plans for instruction. The opinions of students and parents were reflected in the individualized plans for instructions on only a limited basis. There were some significant differences among the three different types of special education high schools, and their unique characteristics were described. Three recommendations for the future practice of Japanese individualized transition support plans were outlined. We suggest increased collaboration with other service agencies for shared responsibility, parent participation for transition planning process, and student involvement with self-determination in the transition planning process.

In this study, subjects were randomly selected from schools all over Japan with the use of cluster sampling method. The response rate was, however, limited to 75%

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of the initial sample. So this might have caused some bias for the findings. Also the current study only examined the teachers' perspectives. Little research has examined transition needs in young adults from their own or their parents' perspectives (Mizutani, Kinomura, Ishida, & Yanagimoto, 2001). Therefore, future research should investigate the perspectives of students, parents, and local agencies with regard to the current practices of transition assistance and the individual planning process.

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